

Lesson 5

Bringing It Home

Rationale

The purpose of this lesson is for students to consider the issue of segregation as it applies to their own school and social experiences. Students research local demographics and explore patterns of segregation and integration in their school and community. In addition, they reflect upon their own experiences with social boundaries and hierarchies, examine the personal and institutional benefits of engaging in social action and identify concrete ways to create positive change in their schools.

Objectives

- Students will consider the issues of segregation and diversity as they relate to their own school.
- Students will research and analyze demographic data about their school and community.
- Students will reflect upon their personal experiences with segregation and social boundaries at school.
- Students will examine benefits of engaging in social action.
- Students will identify ways to create concrete change in their school.

Age Range

Grades 9–12

Time

Two-three class periods or 1 hour 30 minutes – 2 hours 15 minutes

Requirements

Handouts and Resources:

- [How Diverse is Your School Community?](#) (for teacher reference only)
- [Don't Talk to Her](#) (one for each student)
- [How to Mix It Up](#) (one for each student)

Other Material:

- chart paper, markers, local demographic data (optional)

Advanced Preparation

- Reproduce handouts as directed above.

Techniques and Skills

collecting and analyzing data, cooperative group work, critical thinking, forming opinions, large and small group discussion, reading skills, research skills, social action

Procedures

Part I

1. Post a sheet of paper with the word “AGREE” written in large print on one wall of the classroom and another with the word “DISAGREE” on the opposite wall. Let students know that they are going to form a human barometer. (Make sure they understand that the word barometer refers to both an instrument for determining air pressure and for measuring changes, such as in public opinion).

Key Words

Barometer
Border
Boundary
Clique
Demographic
Desegregation
Inequality
Integration
Segregation
Social justice

2. Tell students that you will be reading several statements aloud, and that they should move to the end of the room that best reflects their opinions about each statement—“AGREE”, “DISAGREE”, or somewhere in between. Instruct students that, during this part of the activity, they should move about silently and hold all questions and comments until all of the statements have been read. If it is not possible for students to physically move around the room, have them respond to the statements by raising an improvised sign or by clapping for their desired response.
3. Read the following statements, one at a time, allowing enough time for students to position themselves on the “barometer.” Encourage students to look around and notice the diversity of opinion among their classmates for each statement.
 - Our school district has no problem with segregation.
 - Our particular school has a diverse student population.
 - In our school, all students have an equal opportunity to succeed.
 - Students from different backgrounds can be found in most classes and school activities.
 - Students from different backgrounds regularly socialize with each other at school.
 - I feel comfortable socializing with students from different racial or ethnic groups at school.

After you have read the statements, allow some time for students to process the activity. Ask what they noticed about their peers’ responses. Which statements generated the most agreement? Which yielded the least agreement? What might account for the disparity in opinions or experiences? Which items raised the most conflicts or questions for students? How can they learn more in order to clarify some of the differences in perspective or questions that arose?

Part II

[NOTE: This part of the lesson requires the collection of demographic data about your school and district. If it is not feasible to gather and/or openly discuss such information in your particular school, skip this part of the lesson and proceed to Part III below.]

1. Suggest to students that one way to learn more about the issue of segregation in their school and district is to research the numbers. If possible, help students to learn where they can find local demographic information and assign them various facts to collect (see [How Diverse is Your School Community?](#) for suggestions). Alternatively, you can gather this information in advance and provide your students with an overview.
2. Once the data has been collected, spend some time in class discussing any trends or patterns that emerge. Help students to see how the racial, ethnic and class composition of your school compares to other local schools, the district overall, and the community in which they live. If students have participated in Lesson 4, compare your school’s numbers with national data from the handout, [School Segregation: Current Trends](#).
3. Discuss the ways in which housing segregation and other factors may contribute to demographic patterns at your school. Encourage students to reflect on whether or not they believe that segregation is a problem in their school and community and what, if anything, should be done about it.

Part III

1. Suggest to students that the issues of segregation and diversity may seem overwhelming and something over which they have no control. While the biggest problems may be for politicians to solve, however, there are ways in which individuals can make an impact.
2. Distribute copies of [Don’t Talk to Her](#), which is an essay written by a middle school student struggling with the growing social boundaries that divide his friends into separate cliques. Read the story together as a class or have students read it to themselves. In small groups or as a whole class, discuss some of the following questions:
 - As the author reflects on the cliques that exist at his school, he asks, “When did these boundaries go up around me?” Have you noticed such boundaries at your school? When and why do you think they surfaced?

- The author notes that his school cafeteria is divided into “Rockers, African Americans, Hispanics, and the Popular Kids.” What “crowds” exist at your school? Do students socialize across these groups? What encourages or discourages them from doing so?
 - The author says that “social boundaries are a way to avoid the things we are afraid of, things we may not understand about others.” Do you agree? What differences keep people in your school apart?
 - The author wonders how he can look beyond appearances when it's the main focus of everyone around him. What can individuals do to get beyond appearances and change some of the negative social patterns that exist at school?
3. Focus with students on the last question above. Challenge students to identify the benefits of moving beyond appearances and the ways they can bridge the social boundaries that exist at school.
 4. In small groups or as a whole class, have students share their ideas for concrete ways to de-emphasize cliques and encourage socialization across groups. Record their ideas on chart paper so that they can be discussed and put into action over time. Share information with the class about one or more of the model programs below. Engage the class in planning an action or solicit a small group of volunteers who are interested in working with you to create change in your school.

Model Programs:

[Mix It Up](#) is a project that challenges students to move beyond artificial labels and exclusive cliques by socializing with students from a variety of groups and backgrounds. Every year on *Mix It Up at Lunch Day*, hundreds of thousands of students across the country sit in the cafeteria with students from different groups and backgrounds as a way to diminish social boundaries and stimulate ongoing dialogue about this issue. More information and the date of the next *Mix It Up Day* can be found on the project Web site, but students don't have to wait to get started. The handout, [How to Mix It Up](#), provides students with action steps for planning their own *Mix It Up* event at school, including how to organize, publicize, and follow up on their *Mix It Up Day*.

[Border Crossers](#) brings together young students from segregated neighborhoods to explore issues of discrimination, inequality and social justice, and develop student leadership toward lasting social change. Students meet monthly to read literature, have discussions and play games that explore segregation and racism. They also examine the real and artificial borders that exist on maps and that separate people based on their differences. Students select people or groups who have been the targets of discrimination and initiate social action projects that involve other students, parents and their school communities. They design and facilitate presentations that bring family, friends and community members together to learn more about “crossing borders.”

How Diverse is Your School Community?

There's a lot of talk these days about diversity in schools, but how aware are you of your school's particular makeup? Do you know which racial, ethnic and class groups are most and least represented in your school? Do you know how these numbers compare to other schools in your district or to your community as a whole?

- 1. Consult one or more of the following sources in order to research your school's demographics—the characteristics of the people who go there.**
 - Your school and district Web sites
 - The administrative staff at your school or district office
 - Your town's city hall or public records office
 - A local newspaper
 - The reference section of your public library

- 2. Once you know where to locate the information you need, work with your teacher to identify one or more of the following items to research.**
 - The total number of students in your school and district
 - The percentage of students in your school and district from the following racial groups: African American, Latina/o, White, Asian, Native American, and Multiracial
 - The percentage of people in your town or city from the following racial groups: African American, Latina/o, White, Asian, Native American, and Multiracial
 - The percentage of students in your school and district categorized as poor (usually measured by the number of students who receive free or reduced price lunch)
 - The percentage of people in your town or city categorized as poor
 - The percentage of students in your school and district who are categorized as English Language Learners
 - The percentage of people in your town or city who are categorized as English Language Learners
 - The above figures for other neighborhood schools (for comparison purposes)

Don't Talk to Her

The reflection below is by Dane Pennerman, a student struggling with the social boundaries that exist in his middle school.

As Roberto and I entered the cafeteria, I saw my friend Melissa.

"What's up, Melissa?"

Roberto punched me and said, "Don't speak to her."

"Why?"

"She's a Rocker."

"Roberto, she's still my friend."

As Roberto and I proceeded to the lunch line, I saw my buddy Hakeem.

"Hey Dane, come sit with us?" Hakeem offered.

"Go ahead, Dane, I'll catch you later," Roberto said, looking at me blankly.

"No, Roberto, you can come, too!"

Roberto looked at Hakeem's table and said to me, "I'll just see you after school, Dane."

All these people were some of my best friends in elementary school. What happened? When did I miss this? When did these boundaries go up around me? And more important, why hadn't I noticed them? Was I trying to pretend that they didn't exist?

The close friendships I had cultivated in elementary school were disappearing. All of my friends were now in their own "cliques."

The school cafeteria was now divided into Rockers, African Americans, Hispanics, and the Popular Kids. Why couldn't we all hang out together? Why does Hakeem call me "white boy" when he sees me talking to my Caucasian friends? Why does Roberto only know me between classes?

How am I supposed to handle this?

I view Hakeem, Melissa, and Roberto as friends, equally. How can I look beyond appearances, when it's the main focus of everyone around me? Am I wrong for not participating in the boundaries my friends create?

Sometimes I try to discuss the issues my friends have with each other. Is there really any basis for the ill feelings? I feel their dislike for each other is unwarranted.

I have yet to hear valid reasons from anyone. I remember talking to Hakeem. He told me Roberto's not really my friend: "Just because the two of you have a class together and walk in the halls together means nothing. When his Spanish friends come around, he doesn't know you, Dane."

I feel social boundaries are a way to avoid the things we are afraid of, things we may not understand about others. The way a person chooses to dress or the color of his or her skin should not separate us.

Melissa's black clothing is the way she chooses to look on the outside. Clothes do not make the person. Melissa faces some of the same challenges in life as a teen that Roberto and Hakeem face. When I try to find differences between my three friends, outside of individual appearance, there are none.

I know the three of them would really like each other if they gave one another a chance. On a daily basis, I push my friends to become friends. I always follow a negative remark with a positive one. I'm always quick to point out good points about one friend to the other.

I feel I am in the middle of something that may last my entire life, well after my middle school years. This bothers me. How can I get Rockers, Hispanics, and African Americans to accept each other?

I know communication is one way to mend this rift. If people who look different on the outside can get past appearances, then we will be able to heal.

Maybe as teens of the new millennium, we can solve this problem and cross all social boundaries.

This essay was written by Dane Pennerman for Teaching Tolerance's Mix It Up. Reprinted with permission from Teaching Tolerance, www.tolerance.org.

How to Mix It Up

Mix It Up supports the efforts of students who are interested in identifying, questioning and crossing social boundaries. Mix It Up is a project of Tolerance.org, Teaching Tolerance, and the Study Circles Resource Center.

How to Mix it Up

At many schools around the country, the cafeteria at lunchtime is a social map of the whole school—a map criss-crossed with boundaries. These boundaries exist for many reasons—habit, friendship, status, fear, prejudice. The simple space of a cafeteria table is, for many of us, a comfort zone where we can be ourselves with those who know us best. Touch base. Regroup. Let down the guard that classroom pressures often require of us. For others, the lunchroom with all its boundaries is a world with its own pressures—a world of familiar strangers and rigid expectations. But each year students across the country stir things up in their school cafeterias. And you can do it, too. Here are some ideas to help you Mix It Up at lunch.

Reach Out

All it takes is one person venturing outside the comfort zone to stir things up, but on Mix It Up Day, why not have a whole crowd sitting someplace new? Ask your friends to join in. Pitch the idea to the clubs, sports teams and other groups you belong to. Get teachers and administrators on board. Publicize the event with posters, stickers, raps and t-shirts.

Plan

How are you going to “do the day?” Here are five ways to mix up lunchroom seating.

- Create a “calendar” out of 12 tables and sit by birth month or by Zodiac signs.
- Number several tables and draw your seat assignment from a hat.
- Draw colored candies out of a bag and sit with the matching tablecloth.
- Find a table where you don't know more than two people.
- Give each person a “ticket” that matches the color tag on a chair.

Act

The day has arrived and you're sitting at a new table staring at a bunch of people you don't know. What now? Here are five ideas to jump-start the conversation.

- What's the last CD you bought?
- Imagine you rule the world. What's the first law you'd make?
- What's the craziest thing you ever did in public?
- You're signing autographs. What are you famous for?
- You're the principal. What's the first class you drop—and what class do you add?

Dig Deeper

How'd it go? What worked? What didn't? What did you enjoy? Does your school need to look more closely at social boundaries? Start a Mix It Up Dialogue—visit www.mixitup.org to learn how.

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